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IRAQ

Iraqi Refugees and Special Immigrant Visa Holders Face Challenges Resettling in the United States and Obtaining U.S. Government Employment



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Why GAO Did This Study

Since the February 2006 bombing of the Al-Askari Mosque in Samara that triggered the displacement of thousands of Iraqis, the United States has taken a lead role in resettling the displaced. The administration has indicated its intent to assist those Iraqis who supported the United States in Iraq. In addition, Congress authorized the Departments of Defense (DOD) and State (State) to jointly establish and operate a program to offer temporary employment to Iraqi special immigrant visa (SIV) holders in the United States.

This report provides information on the (1) status of resettled Iraqis in the United States and the initial challenges they face, (2) benefits afforded Iraqi refugees and SIV holders, and (3) challenges they face obtaining employment with the federal government. GAO conducted this review under the Comptroller General's authority.

GAO analyzed data on Iraqi refugees and SIV holders in the United States, and laws and regulations on the benefits afforded to them. GAO also analyzed U.S. government employment and personnel security requirements. GAO interviewed officials from five key agencies regarding these requirements.

This report does not contain recommendations. DOD provided official comments. State and the Departments of Homeland Security and Health and Human Services (HHS) provided technical comments. GAO incorporated these comments, as appropriate.

View [GAO-10-274](#) or [key components](#). For more information, contact Joseph A. Christoff at (202) 512-8979 or christoffj@gao.gov.

IRAQ

Iraqi Refugees and Special Immigrant Visa Holders Face Challenges Resettling in the United States and Obtaining U.S. Government Employment

What GAO Found

Between fiscal years 2006 and 2009, the United States admitted 34,470 Iraqi refugees under State's Refugee Admissions Program. In addition, State issued 4,634 SIVs to Iraqis pursuant to two programs, established by Congress to help Iraqis who previously worked for the U.S. government in Iraq. Resettlement agencies, working under cooperative agreements with State, have resettled Iraqis throughout the United States but particularly in California and Michigan. These agencies have found that Iraqis arrive in the United States with high levels of trauma, injury, and illness, which contribute to the challenges they face in resettling in a new country. In addition, entry-level jobs normally available to refugees are scarce and more competitive in the current economic downturn. Iraqi refugees generally have high levels of education, according to U.S. officials and representatives from the resettlement agencies. Nevertheless, Iraqis have struggled to find entry-level employment in the United States.

Iraqi refugees and SIV holders are eligible for resettlement assistance and public benefits upon arrival in the United States. State provides resettlement agencies \$1,800 per person to cover basic housing, food, and assistance for accessing services during their first 30 days in the United States; however, support may continue for up to 90 days if basic needs have not been met. Refugees automatically receive these benefits; Iraqi SIV holders must elect to receive them within 10 days of receiving their visas. In addition, qualified Iraqi refugees and, as a result of December 2009 legislation, qualified SIV holders can receive certain assistance for up to 7 years through public benefits programs. Prior to December 19, 2009, Iraqi SIV holders' eligibility for public benefits generally ceased after 8 months. Both groups can also receive up to 8 months of cash and medical assistance from HHS if they do not qualify for public benefits. In addition, HHS funds social services, including job preparation, English language classes, and assistance with job interviews, for which Iraqi refugees and SIV holders may be eligible for up to 5 years.

Iraqi refugees and SIV holders, including those who acted as interpreters and linguists for civilian agencies and military commands in Iraq, have limited opportunities for federal employment. Most federal positions in the United States require U.S. citizenship and background investigations; certain positions, including most positions related to Arabic or Iraq, also require security clearances, which noncitizens cannot obtain. However, GAO did identify positions at DOD's Defense Language Institute and State's Foreign Service Institute open to qualified noncitizens. Finally, State and DOD have not established the temporary program intended to offer employment to Iraqi SIV holders under authority granted the agencies in fiscal year 2009 legislation. Although both agencies have positions requiring Arabic language skills, neither identified any unfilled needs that could be met by employing Iraqi SIV holders through this joint program.

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Abbreviations

CBP	U.S. Customs and Border Protection
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
DLI	Defense Language Institute
DOD	Department of Defense
DOJ	Department of Justice
FSI	Foreign Service Institute
HHS	Department of Health and Human Services
NDAA	National Defense Authorization Act
NGO	nongovernmental organization
OPE	overseas processing entity
OPM	Office of Personnel Management
ORR	Office of Refugee Resettlement
PRM	Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration
SCHIP	State Children's Health Insurance Program
SIV	special immigrant visa
SNAP	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
SSI	Supplemental Security Income
TANF	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USCIA	U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

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United States Government Accountability Office
Washington, DC 20548

March 9, 2010

Congressional Committees

The February 2006 bombing of the Al-Askari Mosque in Samara triggered sectarian violence in Iraq and increased the number of displaced Iraqis. The United States has taken a lead role in resettling displaced Iraqis under the Department of State's (State) Refugee Admissions Program. In addition, Congress established two special immigrant visa (SIV) programs to help qualified Iraqis who previously worked for the U.S. government in Iraq to immigrate to the United States.¹ The administration has indicated its intent to assist those Iraqis who supported the United States in Iraq. Many worked for the United States as translators, interpreters, or contractors. In addition, Congress authorized the Departments of Defense (DOD) and State to jointly establish and operate a program to offer temporary employment to Iraqi SIV holders in the United States as translators, interpreters, or cultural awareness instructors.²

GAO previously reported on U.S. and international efforts to protect and assist Iraqi refugees in neighboring countries.³ In this report, we (1) provide information on the status of resettled Iraqis in the United States and the initial challenges they face, (2) review the benefits afforded Iraqi refugees and SIV holders, and (3) review the challenges Iraqi refugees and SIV holders face in obtaining employment with the federal government. Due to broad congressional and national interest in the U.S. engagement in Iraq, this work was conducted under the Comptroller General's authority to conduct evaluations on his own initiative. The late Senator Edward Kennedy, former chairman of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, also requested that GAO conduct this work.

¹Under these programs, Iraqi nationals who worked for the U.S. government, as defined in each program's authorizing legislation, and met other conditions are eligible to receive special immigrant visas. See National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2006, Pub. Law No. 109-163, Section 1059 and National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008, Pub. Law No. 110-181, Section 1244.

²Pub. Law No. 110-417, Sec. 1235, Oct. 14, 2008.

³GAO, *Iraqi Refugee Assistance: Improvements Needed in Measuring Progress, Assessing Needs, Tracking Funds, and Developing an International Strategic Plan*, [GAO-09-120](#) (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 21, 2009).

To address our objectives, we collected and analyzed relevant laws, regulations, and agency policies on Iraqi refugees and SIV holders resettling in the United States and the benefits afforded them. We also interviewed officials from State's Bureaus of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) and Consular Affairs; the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP); and the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). We also interviewed representatives from 10 resettlement agencies that work with PRM and ORR to provide benefits and services to refugees and SIV holders. In addition, we analyzed relevant laws, regulations, executive orders, and agency policies on U.S. government employment and personnel security requirements. We interviewed officials from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) regarding requirements for U.S. government employment. We also interviewed program, human resource, and security officials from five key agencies—DOD, State, DHS, the Department of Justice (DOJ), and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)—regarding their employment and personnel security requirements for positions in the United States. We chose these agencies because they have national security missions, ongoing programs in Iraq, and need for personnel with Arabic language skills. We focused on employment in the United States because generally Iraqi refugees and SIV holders who want to apply for U.S. citizenship must reside in the United States for a certain period of time. In addition, refugees' ability to apply for permanent resident status⁴ could be delayed if they travel overseas.⁵ We did not develop an inventory of the agencies' needs for Arabic language skills or Iraqi expertise. The majority of our audit work was completed prior to the December 2009 passage of the fiscal year 2010 Department of Defense Appropriations Act,⁶ which changed Iraqi SIV holders' eligibility for public benefits, and the fiscal year 2010 Consolidated Appropriations

⁴Permanent residents are foreign nationals who are legally permitted to live permanently in the United States. They differ from other legal noncitizens, such as students, who are admitted into the country for a specific purpose and temporary period of time.

⁵By law, refugees must apply for permanent resident status 1 year after entry into the United States. In addition, according to USCIS officials, if an Iraqi refugee returned to Iraq, it could raise issues during the inspection process when attempting to return to the United States, or as part of any application to adjust his/her immigration status or obtain U.S. citizenship, as it could signal that the individual's initial refugee claim may be fraudulent.

⁶See Department of Defense Appropriations Act, 2010, Pub. Law No. 111-118, Section 8120(a), Dec. 19, 2009.

Act,⁷ which made changes to a long standing restriction on the use of appropriated funds to employ noncitizens by the federal government in the United States. We updated our report to reflect these changes, as appropriate. A detailed description of our scope and methodology is included in appendix I.

We conducted our work from July 2009 to March 2010 in accordance with all sections of GAO's Quality Assurance Framework that are relevant to our objectives. The framework requires that we plan and perform the engagement to obtain sufficient and appropriate evidence to meet our stated objectives and to discuss any limitations in our work. We believe that the information and data obtained, and the analysis conducted, provide a reasonable basis for any findings and conclusions.

Background

According to the International Organization for Migration, the February 2006 bombing of the Al-Askari Mosque in Samara triggered sectarian violence, which increased the number of displaced Iraqis. Although military operations, crime, and general insecurity remained factors, sectarian violence became the primary driver for population displacement. Many Iraqis fled their country and immigrated to neighboring countries, particularly to Syria and Jordan.

According to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol provide the foundation for modern refugee protection. According to the Convention, a refugee is someone who, "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country...." UNHCR is mandated to find solutions to the plight of refugees. According to UNHCR, three solutions are available:

- First, voluntary repatriation is the preferred solution for the majority of refugees. Most refugees prefer to return home as soon as circumstances permit (generally when a conflict has ended and a degree of stability has been restored). UNHCR promotes, supports, and facilitates voluntary

⁷See Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2010, Pub. Law No. 111-117, Division C, Title VII, Section 704, Dec. 16, 2009.

repatriation as the best solution for displaced people, provided it is safe and reintegration is viable.

- Second, UNHCR may help refugees integrate and settle in the “asylum,” or host, country where they reside as refugees. Some refugees cannot or are unwilling to return because they would face persecution. According to UNHCR, relatively few host countries allow refugees to settle.
- Third, UNHCR may assist refugees in permanently resettling in third countries. According to UNHCR, only a small number of nations take part in UNHCR resettlement programs worldwide and accept annual quotas of refugees. According to State, historically, less than 1 percent of registered refugees are resettled in third countries. Of the Iraqis resettling in third countries in 2009, UNHCR referred 75 percent (about 62,000) for resettlement in the United States.⁸

This report focuses on the third solution—those Iraqis resettled in the United States. When Iraqi refugees and SIV holders arrive in the United States, they have access to federal- and state-funded assistance⁹ to help them reach self-sufficiency in their new communities. State has primary responsibility for funding and administering initial reception and placement benefits for refugees and SIV holders upon their arrival in the United States. State’s PRM has cooperative agreements with 10 resettlement agencies that coordinate with local affiliates across the country to make referrals and to administer resettlement services and other assistance. HHS’s ORR administers cash and medical assistance, and employment and other social services through the states and resettlement agencies that coordinate services for refugees across the country.

Regarding federal government employment, individuals are generally employed in the competitive, excepted, or Senior Executive Service. When hiring for competitive service positions, agencies use a competitive examination process set forth in Title 5 of the U.S. Code. Some agencies have excepted service positions for which they are not required to follow OPM’s competitive examination process; instead, the agencies have the

⁸The number of UNHCR referrals is greater than the number of Iraqi refugees admitted to the United States in fiscal year 2009 because not all individuals referred by UNHCR are admitted to the United States, and because individuals referred in 2009 may be admitted in subsequent years.

⁹Refugee and SIV families may be eligible for certain state-funded assistance programs, depending on their state’s eligibility standards.

authority to establish their own hiring procedures. When agencies hire for career senior executive positions—top-level policy, supervisory, and managerial positions—the individual’s executive and managerial qualifications must be reviewed and approved by an OPM-administered Senior Executive Service Qualifications Review Board. According to OPM data, the majority of civil service employees in the United States are in the competitive service.

Iraqi Refugees and SIV Holders Arrive under Three Different U.S. Programs and Face Challenges upon Arrival in the United States

Between fiscal years 2006 and 2009, the United States has admitted 34,470 Iraqi refugees under State’s Refugee Admissions Program. Since fiscal year 2007, State has issued 4,634 SIVs to Iraqis.¹⁰ Resettlement agencies, working under cooperative agreements with State, have resettled Iraqis throughout the United States, but particularly in California and Michigan. These agencies have found that Iraqis arrive in the United States with high levels of trauma, injury, and illness, which contribute to the challenges they face in resettling in a new country. In addition, entry-level jobs normally available to refugees are scarce and more competitive in the current economic downturn.

Iraqi Refugees and SIV Holders Arrive under One of Three Different U.S. Programs

State’s PRM manages the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP)—the U.S. government’s program for accepting and processing refugee applications for resettlement in the United States. PRM’s regional refugee coordinator accepts referrals from UNHCR, embassies, and certain nongovernmental organizations (NGO). Certain categories of Iraqis with U.S. affiliations do not need a referral and may apply directly for refugee consideration under a direct access program in Jordan, Egypt, and Iraq.¹¹ Overseas processing entities (OPE), working under a cooperative agreement with State, prescreen the referrals and prepare application forms by collecting and verifying personal and family information, obtaining details of persecution or feared harm, and initiating security name checks. Once the OPE prescreens the case, it is provided to DHS’s U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), which makes periodic

¹⁰Issuance data do not indicate the number of Iraqi SIV holders who were admitted into the United States.

¹¹With the passage of a provision in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2008, Pub. Law No. 110-181, certain refugees of special humanitarian concern could apply directly to USRAP. Such refugees include Iraqis who worked for the U.S. government, for a media organization or NGO headquartered in the United States, or for U.S. contractors, and their family members.

visits to the region to interview refugees and adjudicate their applications for resettlement in the United States. Once USCIS preliminarily approves cases, they are returned to the OPE, which continues processing medical screenings, sponsorship (i.e., the identification of the U.S.-based resettlement agency that will provide initial resettlement benefits), travel arrangements, and cultural orientation, among other things. The cultural orientation, which is a voluntary course for all refugees over the age of 15, addresses essential topics related to processing, travel, and resettlement, such as the role of the resettlement agency, housing, employment, health, and money management. While the OPE coordinates outprocessing, PRM secures a sponsoring resettlement agency in the United States. From fiscal years 2006 through 2009, the United States admitted 34,470 Iraqi refugees (see table 1).

Table 1: Iraqi Refugee Admissions to the United States, Fiscal Years 2006 through 2009

Fiscal year	Referred from UNHCR, embassies, and certain NGOs	Applied through Direct Access Program	Other	Total
2006	183	0	19	202
2007	1,592	0	16	1,608
2008	13,600	187	35	13,822
2009	15,758	2,905	175	18,838
Total	31,133	3,092	245	34,470

Source: State.

Note: Other includes family members of persons lawfully admitted to the United States as refugees.

DHS and State’s Bureau of Consular Affairs also have implemented two SIV programs, established by Congress, to further assist qualified Iraqis who worked for or on behalf of the U.S. government and who want to immigrate to the United States. Both programs cover the principal Iraqi applicants and their dependents. Iraqi SIV holders are admitted into the United States as lawful permanent residents. The first SIV program, established under section 1059 of the NDAA for fiscal year 2006, targets

Iraqi and Afghan translators and their dependents.¹² The second SIV program, established under section 1244 of the NDAA for fiscal year 2008, targets certain Iraqis who had been U.S. government employees, contractors, or subcontractors and their dependents. In January 2008, Congress authorized that up to 5,000 Iraqis per year for the next 5 fiscal years, who had worked for or on behalf of the U.S. government in Iraq and had experienced or were experiencing an ongoing serious threat as a consequence, can receive SIVs.¹³ Some Iraqi refugees may also qualify for the SIV programs.

To apply for special immigrant status, eligible Iraqis may file a petition, including a favorable recommendation from their U.S. civilian or military supervisor documenting their service. USCIS sends approved petitions to State's National Visa Center, which contacts applicants to set up an in-person interview at an embassy or a consulate. Consular officials interview applicants, review the submitted documents and security and medical clearances, and issue an immigrant visa if candidates satisfy all criteria. At the end of fiscal year 2009, State had issued 2,389 SIVs to principal Iraqi applicants out of a maximum authorized 11,050 principal-applicant visas. Under the two programs, the United States issued 4,634 Iraqi SIVs from fiscal years 2007 through 2009 (see table 2). It is unclear how many Iraqis with SIVs have entered the United States. USCIS provided us with data on the number of Iraqi and Afghan SIV holders who were admitted into the United States as permanent residents (or green card holders) between fiscal years 2007 and 2009. Iraqi and Afghan SIVs are issued based on an applicant's nationality. USCIS provided us these data

¹²In January 2006, Congress authorized that up to 50 Iraqi or Afghan translators who worked directly with U.S. armed forces and met other conditions outlined in the law could receive SIVs during any fiscal year. Spouses and children of principal applicants are also eligible to receive SIVs, although these are not counted against the authorized cap. See NDAA for Fiscal Year 2006, Pub. Law No. 109-163, Section 1059. In June 2007, Congress amended the program, authorizing an increase in the limit to 500 SIVs each for fiscal years 2007 and 2008 and expanding it to cover both translators and interpreters who worked directly for the U.S. armed forces and those who worked under chief of mission authority. In fiscal year 2009, the authorized number of SIVs for this program reverted to 50 annually. See An Act to Increase the Number of Iraqi and Afghani Translators and Interpreters Who May Be Admitted to the United States as Special Immigrants, and for Other Purposes, Pub. Law No. 110-36, June 15, 2007.

¹³The applicants must meet other conditions outlined in the law. The law allows that, if the 5,000 ceiling is not met in any given year, the unused authorized amounts can be carried over to the following year. Spouses and children of principal applicants are also eligible to receive SIVs, although these are not counted against the 5,000 cap. See NDAA for Fiscal Year 2008, Pub. Law No. 110-181, Section 1244.

by applicants' country of birth, but could not provide the data by nationality. Therefore, we report only Iraqi SIV issuance data.

Table 2: Special Immigrant Visas Issued to Iraqis, Fiscal Years 2007 through 2009

Fiscal year	Principal applicants		Dependents	
	Number authorized	Number issued	Number issued	Total issued
Section 1059^a				
2007	500	429	383	812
2008	500	357	350	707
2009	50	28	59	87
Total	1,050	814	792	1,606
Section 1244				
2008	5,000	169	125	294
2009	5,000	1,406	1,328	2,734
Total	10,000	1,575	1,453	3,028
Section 1059 and Section 1244				
Total	11,050	2,389	2,245	4,634

Source: State.

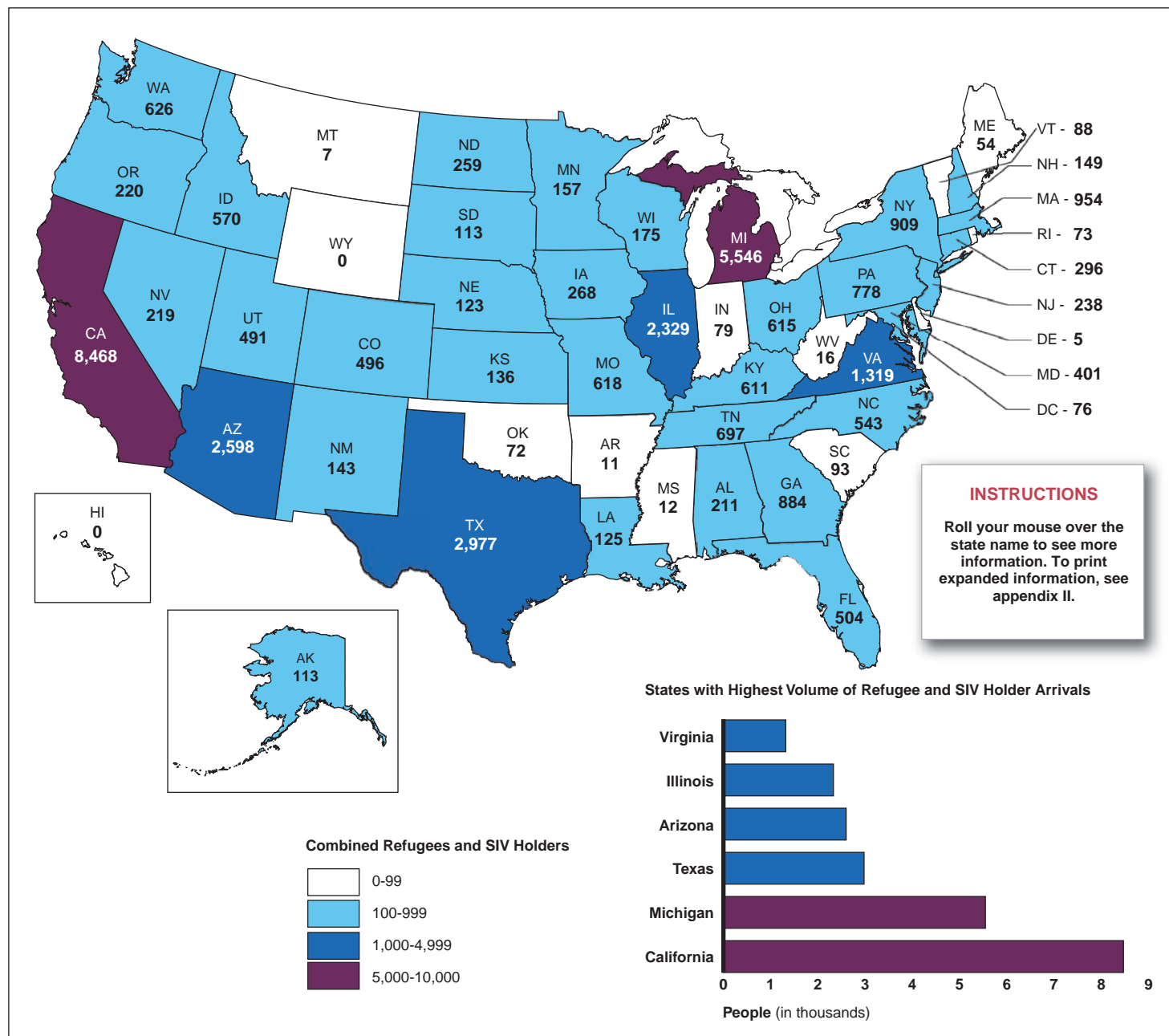
Note: Issuance data do not indicate number of SIV holders who have been admitted into the United States.

^aThe Section 1059 program targets Iraqi and Afghan translators and their dependents. These data are only for Iraqi SIV holders and do not include Afghan SIV holders.

Iraqi Refugees and SIV Holders Have Resettled Across the United States

Since fiscal year 2006, Iraqi refugees and SIV holders have resettled in communities across the United States. Placement decisions consider the location of an individual's family members, potential medical needs, and municipal and sponsoring agency capacity to accept and provide for refugees and SIV holders. The largest populations of recently resettled Iraqis are in California, Michigan, Texas, Arizona, Illinois, and Virginia (see fig. 1 and app. II for more information).

Figure 1: Initial Resettlement, by State, of Iraqi Refugees and Special Immigrant Visa Holders, Fiscal Years 2006 through 2009



Source: GAO analysis of State PRM data.

Note: Iraqi SIV data include only those 1,995 SIV holders (out of 4,634 total issued visas) who signed up to receive PRM-funded resettlement and placement benefits. Arrival data are only for the state in which Iraqis were resettled as of their 30th day in the United States.

Iraqi Refugees and SIV Holders Face Challenges Resettling in the United States

According to NGOs and resettlement agencies, the U.S. refugee resettlement program has been strained by a growing number of Iraqi and Afghan refugees and the economic downturn in the United States. In June 2009, the International Rescue Committee reported that the high levels of trauma, injury, and illness among Iraqi refugees contribute to the precarious nature of their resettlement.¹⁴ Moreover, unemployment and homelessness threaten Iraqi refugees and other populations recently resettled in the United States, according to NGOs and resettlement agencies. In October 2009, the Georgetown Law School reported that a Michigan resettlement office received funding in 2008 for 300 refugees, but served more than 1,200. Caseworkers, dealing with an average of 120 cases at a time—up from 30 the year before—could not provide what they considered sufficient employment services.¹⁵ According to the International Rescue Committee report and resettlement agency officials we interviewed, some Iraqi refugees face eviction because they cannot pay their rent.

The present economic downturn has made jobs normally available to refugees, such as entry-level jobs with limited English proficiency, scarce and more competitive. An ORR official stated that, before the current economic recession, refugees could regularly secure such jobs, but since the recession these positions are generally not available. Most of the resettlement agencies stated that it is taking longer than usual—often as long as 6 months, and in some cases, 9 to 10 months—for incoming refugees to find employment. U.S. officials and resettlement agencies stated that without jobs, some refugees are unable to get by on the levels of assistance afforded them by the U.S. refugee resettlement program.

Iraqi refugees, in particular, have faced difficulties finding work despite their relatively high levels of education, according to PRM, ORR, and USCIS officials, and representatives from the resettlement agencies. According to an ORR official and resettlement agency officials, the U.S. resettlement program does not take into account refugees' prior work experience and education in job placements. Rather, the focus of the program is on securing early employment for refugees. PRM data indicate that many Iraqi refugees who were resettled in the United States in fiscal

¹⁴International Rescue Committee, *Iraqi Refugees in the United States: In Dire Straits* (June 2009).

¹⁵Georgetown Law School, *Refugee Crisis in America: Iraqis and Their Resettlement Experience* (October 2009).

years 2007 through 2009 reported having some secondary education.¹⁶ PRM, ORR, and the resettlement agencies reported that educated Iraqis are struggling to find entry-level employment in the United States, much less employment in their professional field of work. For example, we interviewed three Iraqi refugees about their experience searching for employment in the United States. Two had worked for the U.S. government in Iraq, and one was unable to find an entry-level position requiring no formal education. This individual estimated that he had applied for more than 30 low-skill jobs, such as for a busboy and cleaner, before his former U.S. supervisor in Iraq helped him find a job.

As of December 2009, Iraqi SIV Holders Are Eligible for Resettlement Assistance and Public Benefits to the Same Extent as Refugees

Iraqi refugees and SIV holders are eligible for PRM-funded basic needs support and services upon arrival in the United States. In addition, qualified Iraqi refugees and—as a result of December 2009 legislation—qualified Iraqi SIV holders can receive certain assistance generally for up to 7 years through public benefits programs. Prior to December 19, 2009, Iraqi SIV holders' eligibility for public benefits generally ceased after 8 months. Both groups can receive up to 8 months of ORR-funded cash and medical assistance.

According to PRM, its assistance typically lasts for 30 days; however, support may continue for up to 90 days if basic needs have not been met. All refugees automatically receive this assistance, which includes travel arrangements to their assigned resettlement location, basic housing, food allowances, school enrollments, and referrals for medical needs, through the resettlement agencies. As of January 1, 2010, PRM provides the resettlement agencies \$1,800 per refugee to cover the direct and administrative costs of the assistance. Prior to January 1, 2010, PRM provided resettlement agencies \$900 per refugee. Iraqi SIV holders do not automatically receive these benefits; they must sign up to receive them within 10 days of receiving their visas. SIV holders who do not accept PRM benefits make their own travel arrangements and may resettle anywhere in the United States. According to PRM data, 1,995 SIV holders (out of 4,634 total issued visas for these years) have participated in the PRM program since 2007, when Iraqi SIV holders were first authorized to access these benefits.

¹⁶Data are from October 1, 2006, through November 18, 2009.

Qualified Iraqi refugees and, as of December 19, 2009, qualified Iraqi SIV holders may be eligible for federal public benefit programs, including Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid and State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly the Food Stamp Program),¹⁷ for generally up to 7 years, depending on the program and the state.¹⁸ Permanent residents (such as Iraqi SIV holders) are generally barred from receiving certain public benefits for their first 5 years in the United States.¹⁹ However, in 2007, Congress passed legislation establishing that Iraqi SIV holders could receive public benefits for up to 6 months.²⁰ In 2008, Congress extended their allowance to 8 months.²¹ The DOD Appropriations Act for fiscal year 2010 included a provision which allows Iraqi SIV holders to be eligible for public benefits to the same extent, and for the same period of time, as refugees. Relevant agencies are in the process of issuing guidance to further define the application of this provision to Iraqi SIV holders.

In addition, ORR funds social services, for which Iraqi refugees and SIV holders may be eligible, for up to 5 years. ORR social services, which include job preparation, English language classes, and assistance with job interviews, do not have income requirements and are designed to find refugees employment within 1 year of enrollment. Figure 2 provides information on the types of resettlement assistance available to qualified Iraqi refugees and SIV holders, and the impact of the December 19, 2009, legislation on the duration of time for which they may be eligible for this assistance.

¹⁷HHS oversees TANF, Medicaid, and SCHIP. The Social Security Administration oversees SSI, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture oversees SNAP.

¹⁸While TANF, Medicaid, SNAP, and SSI all serve low-income people, the financial eligibility thresholds, or income limits, for these benefits differ. Specifically, TANF's income limit varies by state. Medicaid income limits can also vary by state, as well as type of recipient. For example, the Medicaid income limits for children generally range from 100 to 185 percent of the federal poverty guidelines. The SNAP income limit is generally set at 130 percent of the federal poverty guidelines. In contrast, SSI's income limit is set at a fixed dollar amount.

¹⁹See the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, Pub. Law No. 104-193, Aug. 22, 1996.

²⁰Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2008, Pub. Law No. 110-161, Dec. 26, 2007.

²¹NDAA for Fiscal Year 2008, Pub. Law No. 110-181, Jan. 28, 2008.

Figure 2: Highlights of Resettlement Assistance Available to Iraqi Refugees and Special Immigrant Visa Holders in the United States

Program	Description	Benefits eligibility timeline (from date of arrival, in years)	
		As of December 19, 2009	Prior to December 19, 2009
Immediate needs		Iraqi refugees and SIV holders	Iraqi SIV holders
PRM reception and placement services	Reception at airport. Transportation to resettlement destination.	Upon arrival	Upon arrival
	Initial food, housing, and necessary clothing. Referrals to medical, training, and other social service programs.	<div><div></div>Up to 3 months</div> <div>01234567</div> <div>Years</div>	<div><div></div>Up to 3 months</div> <div>01</div> <div>Years</div>
Cash and medical assistance			
Either... TANF	Time-limited cash assistance and other support services for qualifying low-income individuals with dependent children.	<div><div></div>Up to 5 years</div>	<div><div></div>Up to 8 months^{a,b}</div>
or... Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA)	Program similar to TANF for refugees and Iraqi SIV holders who do not qualify for TANF.	<div><div></div>Up to 8 months</div>	<div><div></div>Up to 8 months</div>
SSI	Cash assistance to low-income individuals who are aged, blind, or disabled.	<div><div></div>Up to 7 years^c</div>	<div><div></div>Up to 8 months^{a,d}</div>
Either... Medicaid/SCHIP ^e	Health care coverage for qualifying low-income individuals.	<div><div></div>Up to 7 years</div>	<div><div></div>Up to 8 months^{a,b}</div>
or... Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA)	Program similar to Medicaid for refugees and Iraqi SIV holders who do not qualify for Medicaid.	<div><div></div>Up to 8 months</div>	<div><div></div>Up to 8 months</div>
Social and employment services			
ORR social services	Emphasis on getting refugees early employment, including employment preparation and job placement and retention services.	<div><div></div>Up to 5 years^f</div>	<div><div></div>Up to 8 months</div>
Other benefits			
SNAP, formerly Food Stamp Program	Food assistance for qualifying low-income individuals.	<div><div></div>Eligible indefinitely</div>	<div><div></div>Up to 8 months^{a,g,h}</div>

Source: GAO.

Notes:

Section 8120(a) of the DOD Appropriations Act for fiscal year 2010 changed Iraqi SIV holders' eligibility, as of December 19, 2009. Relevant agencies are in the process of issuing guidance to further define the application of this provision to Iraqi SIV holders.

This figure does not include all exceptions to the general eligibility time frames for refugees and SIV holders to receive federal programs. Rather, we included those exceptions most relevant to the Iraqi SIV holders and refugees who have entered the United States since the start of the Iraq war.

In general, to receive benefits, Iraqi refugees and SIV holders must meet all financial and nonfinancial eligibility criteria of each program. However, PRM's reception and placement benefits and ORR's social services benefits are not subject to financial eligibility criteria. In addition, once refugees or permanent residents obtain citizenship, their eligibility for SSI, TANF, Medicaid, SCHIP, or SNAP is the same as the eligibility for any U.S. citizen. Their eligibility for ORR Social Services ends when they obtain citizenship.

^aIraqi SIV holders in the United States who were veterans of, or on active duty in, the United States Military, or their spouse, unmarried dependent child, or unremarried surviving spouse, continued to be eligible beyond 8 months.

^bIraqi SIV holders generally would have been re-eligible after 5 years, though states are authorized to provide or deny Medicaid or TANF to most permanent residents after they completed the 5-year waiting period.

^cThe SSI Extension for Elderly and Disabled Refugees Act (Pub. Law No. 110-328) provides additional benefits for up to 2 years, and in certain cases 3 years, for qualifying immigrant SSI recipients who meet certain requirements. This extension is effective from October 1, 2008, until September 30, 2011, after which time noncitizens' eligibility reverts to 7 years.

^dIraqi SIV holders would have needed to be in the United States for 5 years and have been credited with 40 work quarters to be re-eligible for SSI benefits.

^eBoth refugees and SIV holders are eligible for emergency Medicaid from the date of their arrival in the United States, if they otherwise meet the eligibility requirements for their state's Medicaid program.

^fORR social services include citizenship and naturalization preparation services and referral and interpretation services, which may be offered beyond 5 years.

^gChildren under the age of 18 continue to be eligible for this program beyond these time limits.

^hIraqi SIV holders would have been re-eligible for this program after 5 years in the United States.

As figure 2 also shows, Iraqi refugees and SIV holders who are not eligible for TANF or Medicaid may be eligible for ORR-funded Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA)²² and Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA) for up to 8 months.²³ According to ORR, most Iraqi refugees and SIV holders who do not qualify for TANF or Medicaid are eligible for RCA and RMA. Refugee resettlement assistance programs, such as cash assistance, ensure that refugees become self-sufficient as quickly as possible after they arrive in the United States. To participate in RCA, qualifying refugees and SIV holders must register for employment services and generally accept the

²² According to ORR officials, adults without dependent children are the most frequent cases of individuals who do not qualify for TANF, but who do qualify for RCA.

²³ RCA and RMA has decreased over time, according to ORR. As of April 1, 1981, refugees were eligible for 36 months of RCA and RMA benefits. Since October 1, 1991, refugees are limited to 8 months.

first job offered, unless they can show good cause for not accepting the position.

Iraqi Refugees and SIV Holders Face Challenges in Obtaining U.S. Government Employment

Current requirements make it difficult for qualified Iraqi refugees and SIV holders to obtain U.S. government employment. Specifically, most federal jobs in the United States require U.S. citizenship and background investigations, and Arabic language positions often require security clearances, which noncitizens cannot obtain. Over the course of our work, we identified two institutes at DOD and State that have some flexibility in hiring noncitizens for U.S. positions. Finally, DOD and State have not implemented a program intended to employ SIV holders under authority granted in 2009 legislation.

Most Federal Positions in the United States Require U.S. Citizenship and Background Investigations; Most Arabic Positions Also Require a Security Clearance

U.S. government hiring requirements limit the extent to which noncitizens—including Iraqi refugees and SIV holders—can be employed in federal government positions in the United States. Iraqi refugees and SIV holders seeking federal government employment also face challenges posed by requirements for background investigations, and, for certain positions, security clearances.

First, U.S. government agencies are restricted from employing noncitizens in competitive service positions.²⁴ For example, USCIS reported that it may employ only U.S. citizens and nationals as Arabic language specialists because the positions are in the competitive service. Under a provision passed in the fiscal year 2010 Consolidated Appropriations Act, agencies can use appropriated funds to employ qualifying permanent residents and refugees seeking U.S. citizenship in the excepted service or the Senior

²⁴Under Executive Order No. 11935, only U.S. citizens and nationals may be employed in competitive service positions. 41 Fed. Reg. 37,301 (1976). See also 5 C.F.R. sec. 7.3 and sec. 338.101. In rare cases, agencies can employ noncitizens in competitive service positions, when necessary, to promote the efficiency of the service—such as if the agency is unable to find qualified U.S. citizens to fill these positions. However, the agency must also be in compliance with other laws on federal hiring of noncitizens.

Executive Service.²⁵ Second, a particular agency may have specific legislation that prohibits that agency from employing noncitizens in certain positions. For example, State may employ only U.S. citizens in the Foreign Service,²⁶ including its overseas positions that require Arabic.²⁷ Similarly, DHS's Transportation Security Administration may only employ U.S. citizens as Transportation Security Officers.²⁸

According to OPM officials, it is difficult to complete background investigations, which are required for all U.S. government employees,²⁹ on Iraqi refugees and SIV holders. For example, it is difficult to obtain the information necessary to verify Iraqi refugees' or SIV holders' employment history and other information required for the investigation.³⁰ In addition, OPM officials stated that the background checks used to hire Iraqis as part of the U.S. mission in Iraq are not sufficient to substitute for the background investigation required for civil service employment in the United States.

In addition, some U.S. government positions may also require security clearances to ensure that national security information is entrusted only to those who have proven reliability and loyalty to the nation; however,

²⁵For many years, Congress has passed an annual ban on the use of appropriated funds for compensating federal employees working in the United States who are not U.S. citizens or nationals unless they met one of several exceptions. Under the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2010, Pub. Law No. 111-117, Division C, Title VII, Section 704, Dec. 16, 2009, this general prohibition still applies, though there were changes in several of the exemptions. Under the 2010 provision, certain groups are now exempt, including: persons who are lawfully admitted for permanent residence and are seeking citizenship as outlined in 8 U.S.C. 1324b(a)(3)(B); and persons who are admitted as refugees under 8 U.S.C. 1157 or granted asylum under 8 U.S.C. 1158 and who have filed a declaration of intention to become lawful permanent residents and then citizens, when eligible.

²⁶22 U.S.C. sec. 3941.

²⁷In 2008, 43 percent of Foreign Service officers in Arabic language-designated positions did not meet the language requirements of their positions (107 officers in 248 filled positions). See GAO, *Department of State: Comprehensive Plan Needed to Address Persistent Foreign Language Shortfalls*, [GAO-09-955](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 17, 2009).

²⁸49 U.S.C. sec. 44935(e)(2)(A)(ii).

²⁹Executive Order No. 10450. 18 Fed. Reg. 2489 (1953).

³⁰The investigation must include a national agency check, including a check of the FBI's fingerprint files and written inquiries to appropriate local law enforcement agencies, former employers, references, and schools attended, according to the Executive Order.

noncitizens cannot obtain security clearances.³¹ Four of the five agencies we reviewed reported that security clearances are required for most or all of their positions that require or prefer knowledge of Arabic or Iraq; USAID requires security clearances for all direct-hire positions. For example, DOD, DHS, and DOJ have intelligence positions that may require Arabic, but all such positions require a security clearance. Similarly, USAID officials said that, while they have a preference for persons who speak Arabic or have knowledge of Iraq, all civil service and all Foreign Service positions at USAID require security clearances. In addition, officials in the Human Rights Violators and War Crimes Unit in DHS's Immigrations and Customs Enforcement reported that, as of September 2009, there were 20 open investigations that would benefit from Arabic language skills. However, all staff in the unit must have security clearances.

DOD and State Have Some Flexibility to Hire Noncitizens for Positions in the United States

Certain federal positions in the United States at DOD and State are open to noncitizens, including Iraqi refugees and SIV holders. Specifically, as of November 6, 2009, DOD's Defense Language Institute (DLI) reported having 501 Arabic positions—including 32 open positions; all were available to noncitizens. Similarly, all 21 Arabic positions at State's Foreign Service Institute (FSI) are available to noncitizens, according to FSI (see table 3). Both DLI and FSI reported that they had previously hired foreign nationals to fill these types of positions.

³¹Executive Order No. 12968, 60 Fed. Reg. 40,245 (1995). The Executive Order also lays out the provisions for Limited Access Authorizations, which are not security clearances, but which allow noncitizens limited and controlled access to specific classified information required by their position. An agency can grant a Limited Access Authorization only if the past 10 years of the individual's life can be investigated; additional investigative procedures can also be undertaken.

Table 3: Arabic Language Positions in the United States at DOD and State for Eligible Noncitizens, as of November 6, 2009

	DLI Arabic positions	FSI Arabic positions
U.S. citizens	275	14
Noncitizens	194	7
Open positions	32	0
Total	501	21

Sources: DOD and State.

Note: DOD data on the number of Arabic positions are based on the needs of the services and may be higher because they include supervisory staff who speak Arabic. Under DLI's Faculty Personnel System, supervisory staff may be moved into teaching positions. DLI and FSI determined the number of noncitizens by examining personnel records.

DLI and FSI can hire noncitizens, including Iraqi refugees and SIV holders, because language instructor positions at DLI and FSI are in the excepted service.³² Neither DLI nor FSI require security clearances because Arabic instructors do not require access to classified information, according to personnel officials at each institute. However, the positions do require background investigations. The positions may also require degrees or other educational backgrounds.

DOD and State Have Not Used Their Statutory Authority to Employ Iraqi SIV Holders

In fiscal year 2009, the NDAA³³ authorized DOD and State to jointly establish a temporary program to employ Iraqi SIV holders who have resettled in the United States as translators, interpreters, and cultural awareness instructors, but the agencies have not done so. According to OPM officials, DOD and State are authorized to hire Iraqi SIV holders as (1) temporary employees in excepted service positions,³⁴ or (2) as personal services contractors, in which case they are not federal employees. In the committee report for the fiscal year 2010 NDAA,³⁵ the

³²In addition, all DOD positions and State's language instructors, linguists, and other academic and training specialists are exempt from the ban against using appropriated funds to compensate noncitizens in federal government positions in the United States. See 10 U.S.C. sec. 1584 and 22 U.S.C. sec. 4024(a)(4)(B).

³³Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009, Pub. Law No. 110-417, Oct. 14, 2008, Sec. 1235.

³⁴According to State officials, State derives its authority to hire non-U.S. citizens from the Foreign Service Act.

³⁵Report of the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives, H.R. Rep. No. 111-166 (2009).

House Armed Services Committee noted that Iraqi SIV holders' fluency in Arabic and knowledge of Iraq could be useful to the U.S. government. The committee also noted that many of the SIV holders worked on behalf of the United States and coalition forces for years, often at great risk to themselves or their families. Although DOD and State have needs for Arabic speakers, such as language instructors at DLI and FSI, DOD policy officials and State human resource officials stated that the agencies do not plan to establish this program to employ qualified Iraqi SIV holders to fill any unmet needs.³⁶ A senior DOD policy official stated that DOD's human resources divisions did not have a need for additional Arabic speakers. Moreover, DOD and State officials stated that the departments did not receive any funding for the program.

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

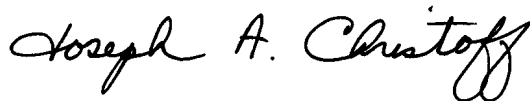
DOD provided written comments on a draft of this report (see appendix III). State, DHS, and HHS provided technical comments, which we incorporated, as appropriate. We also sent a draft of this report to DOJ, USAID, and OPM, but they did not provide comments.

DOD noted that it is meeting its need for translators, interpreters, and cultural awareness instructors with knowledge of Arabic or Iraq through existing hiring authorities. Therefore, as we state in our report, DOD has not identified a need to establish the temporary employment program for Iraqi SIV holders pursuant to the NDAA for fiscal year 2009.

We are sending copies of this report to interested congressional committees and the Secretaries of State, Defense, Health and Human Services, and Homeland Security, as well as the Attorney General, the Administrator of USAID, and the Director of OPM. This report will also be available at no charge on the GAO Web site at <http://www.gao.gov>. If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-8979 or christoffj@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of

³⁶GAO has reported about foreign language needs at DOD and State. See GAO, *Military Training: DOD Needs a Strategic Plan and Better Inventory and Requirements Data to Guide Development of Language Skills and Regional Proficiency*, [GAO-09-568](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 19, 2009); and [GAO-09-955](#). In addition, GAO plans to issue reports in 2010 on DHS's foreign language requirements and on the supply, demand, capacity, and future need of foreign language expertise in the federal government.

Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. Key contributors to this report are listed in appendix IV.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joseph A. Christoff". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "C" at the end.

Joseph A. Christoff
Director
International Affairs and Trade

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The Honorable John McCain
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Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

In this report, we (1) provide information on the status of resettled Iraqis in the United States and the initial challenges they face, (2) review the benefits afforded to Iraqi refugees and special immigrant visa (SIV) holders, and (3) review the challenges faced by Iraqi refugees and SIV holders in obtaining employment with the federal government.

To provide information on the number and location of resettled Iraqis and the initial challenges they face, we collected and analyzed documentation and interviewed officials from the Department of State's (State) Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) and Consular Affairs; the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR); and the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). In addition, we interviewed representatives from 10 resettlement agencies that work with PRM and ORR to provide benefits and services to Iraqi refugees and SIV holders: Church World Service; Episcopal Migration Ministries; Ethiopian Community Development Council; Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society; Iowa Department of Human Services, Bureau of Refugee Services; International Rescue Committee; Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service; U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants; U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops; and World Relief. We also interviewed two nongovernmental organizations (NGO) that work with PRM and ORR to provide technical assistance to resettlement agencies on refugee employment and cultural adjustment issues. We reviewed reports issued by NGOs on the status of Iraqi refugees in the United States and the challenges they face in resettling in this country. We interviewed several Iraqi refugees about their resettlement experiences; their views or experiences may not be representative of other refugees or SIV holders.

To determine the reliability of Consular Affairs data on Iraqi SIV issuances, we interviewed the Consular Affairs official who maintains this data. We determined that the data were sufficiently reliable to report on the number of Iraqi SIVs issued between fiscal years 2007 and 2009. USCIS provided us with data on the number of Iraqi and Afghan SIV holders who were admitted into the United States as permanent residents (or green card holders) between fiscal years 2007 and 2009. Iraqi and Afghan SIVs are issued based on an applicant's nationality. USCIS provided us these data by applicants' country of birth, but could not provide the data by nationality. As a result, we determined that these data were not sufficiently reliable to indicate how many Iraqi SIV holders were admitted into the United States during this time period. Therefore, we report only Iraqi SIV issuance data. To determine the reliability of PRM data on resettled Iraqi refugees and SIV holders, we interviewed the PRM officials

who monitor and use these data. We determined that the data were sufficiently reliable to report on the number, locations, and reported general education levels of resettled Iraqis between fiscal years 2006 and 2009.

To review the benefits afforded Iraqi refugees and SIV holders, we collected and analyzed relevant laws, regulations, and agency policies regarding federally and state-funded and administered refugee resettlement programs. We interviewed officials from PRM and ORR to determine the types of benefits available and their eligibility requirements. The majority of our audit work was completed prior to the December 2009 passage of the fiscal year 2010 Department of Defense (DOD) Appropriations Act, which changed Iraqi SIV holders' eligibility for public benefits.

To review the challenges Iraqi refugees and SIV holders face in obtaining employment with the federal government, we analyzed relevant laws, regulations, executive orders, and agency policies on U.S. government employment and personnel security requirements. The majority of our audit work was completed prior to the December 2009 passage of the fiscal year 2010 Consolidated Appropriations Act, which made changes to a long standing restriction on the use of appropriated funds to employ noncitizens by the federal government in the United States. We interviewed officials from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) regarding requirements for U.S. government employment. We also interviewed program, human resource, and security officials from five key agencies—DOD (specifically, the Army), State, DHS, the Department of Justice, and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)—regarding their employment and personnel security requirements positions in the United States. We chose these agencies because they have national security missions, ongoing programs in Iraq, and needs for personnel with Arabic language skills; we did not include the intelligence community. We focused on employment in the United States because generally Iraqi refugees and SIV holders who want to apply for U.S. citizenship must reside in the United States for a certain period of time. In addition, refugees' ability to apply for permanent resident status could be delayed if

they travel overseas.¹ We did not develop an inventory of the agencies' needs for Arabic language skills or Iraqi expertise. We also interviewed policy officials at DOD and State regarding the temporary program authorized by the fiscal year 2009 Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act to employ Iraqi SIV holders who have resettled in the United States as translators, interpreters, and cultural awareness instructors at DOD and State.

To assess the reliability of data on Arabic positions at DOD's Defense Language Institute (DLI) and State's Foreign Service Institute (FSI), we interviewed human resource officials at DLI, DOD's U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, and FSI. We determined that the data were sufficiently reliable to report on the number of Arabic positions at DLI and FSI.

¹By law, refugees must apply for permanent resident status 1 year after entry into the United States. In addition, according to USCIS officials, if an Iraqi refugee returned to Iraq, it could raise issues during the inspection process when attempting to return to the United States, or as part of any applications to adjust his/her immigration status or obtain U.S. citizenship, as it could signal that the individual's initial refugee claim may be fraudulent.

Appendix II: Initial Resettlement, by State, of Iraqi Refugees and Special Immigrant Visa Holders, Fiscal Years 2006 through 2009

Table 4 provides data on the numbers of Iraqi refugees and special immigrant visa (SIV) holders who were resettled in the United States from fiscal years 2006 through 2009. The six states with the highest numbers in each category are noted with an asterisk.

Table 4: Initial Resettlement, by State, of Iraqi Refugees and Special Immigrant Visa Holders, Fiscal Years 2006 through 2009

State	Iraqi refugees	Iraqi special immigrant visa holders	Total
Alabama	204	7	211
Alaska	2	111*	113
Arizona	2,590*	8	2,598*
Arkansas	11	0	11
California	8,215*	253*	8,468*
Colorado	422	74	496
Connecticut	262	34	296
Delaware	5	0	5
District of Columbia	72	4	76
Florida	462	42	504
Georgia	856	28	884
Hawaii	0	0	0
Idaho	544	26	570
Illinois	2,244*	85	2,329*
Indiana	78	1	79
Iowa	255	13	268
Kansas	134	2	136
Kentucky	585	26	611
Louisiana	121	4	125
Maine	54	0	54
Maryland	362	39	401
Massachusetts	937	17	954
Michigan	5,416*	130*	5,546*
Minnesota	152	5	157
Mississippi	11	1	12
Missouri	560	58	618
Montana	7	0	7
Nebraska	91	32	123
Nevada	218	1	219

**Appendix II: Initial Resettlement, by State, of
Iraqi Refugees and Special Immigrant Visa
Holders, Fiscal Years 2006 through 2009**

State	Iraqi refugees	Iraqi special immigrant visa holders	Total
New Hampshire	149	0	149
New Jersey	229	9	238
New Mexico	139	4	143
New York	863	46	909
North Carolina	465	78	543
North Dakota	257	2	259
Ohio	579	36	615
Oklahoma	57	15	72
Oregon	215	5	220
Pennsylvania	725	53	778
Rhode Island	69	4	73
South Carolina	74	19	93
South Dakota	109	4	113
Tennessee	577	120*	697
Texas	2,595*	382*	2,977*
Utah	469	22	491
Vermont	86	2	88
Virginia	1,178*	141*	1,319*
Washington	581	45	626
West Virginia	14	2	16
Wisconsin	170	5	175
Wyoming	0	0	0
Total	34,470	1,995	36,465

Source: State.

Note: SIV data include only those applicants who elected to receive Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration-funded resettlement and placement benefits. Arrival data are only for the state in which Iraqis were resettled as of their 30th day in the United States.

Appendix III: Comments from the Department of Defense



PERSONNEL AND
READINESS

OFFICE OF THE UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
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WASHINGTON DC 20301 4000

Mr. Joseph A. Christoff
Director, International Affairs and Trade
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G St., NW
Washington, D.C. 20548

FEB 24 2010

Dear Mr. Christoff,

This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the GAO Draft Report, GAO 10-274, 'IRAQ: Iraqi Refugees and Special Immigrant Visa Holders Face Challenges Resettling in the United States and Obtaining U.S. Government Employment,' dated January 22, 2010 (GAO Code 320694). DoD recognizes the importance of resettling displaced Iraqis and supports efforts to integrate Iraqis with Arabic language skills into DoD positions for which they are eligible. The Department is currently meeting its needs for translators, interpreters, and cultural awareness instructors with knowledge of Arabic and or Iraqi culture through existing hiring authorities, and it has the ability to obtain support from Iraqi Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) holders through the use of temporary excepted service positions and personal services contracts.

Therefore, the Department has not identified a need to develop a temporary employment program for Iraqi SIV holders pursuant to Section 1235 of the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2009. If in the future the Department determines that such a program is needed, we will work with the State Department to determine how best to implement the authority granted in Section 1235.

Sincerely,

Marilee Fitzgerald
Acting Deputy Under Secretary of Defense
Civilian Personnel Policy



Appendix IV: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Joseph A. Christoff, (202) 512-8979, christoffj@gao.gov

Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Tetsuo Miyabara, Assistant Director; Kathryn H. Bernet; Muriel Brown; Lynn Cothorn; Martin de Alteriis; Etana Finkler; Corissa Kiyon; Mary Moutsos; Steven Putansu; and Lindsay Read made key contributions to this report.

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